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ABSTRACT

The Ganado (Arizona) Primary School, located on the Navajo Reservation, instituted a successful English writing project for kindergarten children that illustrated that young children should be allowed and expected to develop as writers because they are capable of real writing. Teachers encouraged children to complete drawings and writings in journals, providing them with correct spellings initially but encouraging their own inventive spellings later. To supplement the journal project, teachers regularly read to the children; discussed the children's paintings, drawings, and clay sculptures; taught the children phonetics and some sight words; and developed stories cooperatively with the children. The quality of the writing that resulted varied from child to child. Taken as a whole, the work illustrated five developmental steps towards writing, as the children's writing moved from mimicry through shape and linearity to meaning, word inventories, and short expressions. The project showed that to promote language proficiency at the kindergarten level, teachers must believe that the child is capable of developing language, expect the child's participation, be prepared to risk, and constantly give children opportunities to test their developing theories of language. A collection of 73 of the children's pictures and writings with transcriptions to adult spellings is included. (SB)

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THE SUN IS SHINING IN MY EYES: THE NAVAJO CHILD ENTERS KINDERGARTEN EXPECTING TO WRITE AND HE CAN

by

Sigmund A. Boloz
and
Diana Jenness

January 1984

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THE SUN IS SHINING IN MY EYES: THE NAVAJO CHILD ENTERS KINDERGARTEN EXPECTING TO WRITE AND HE CAN

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> "Teacher! Teacher! It's my turn," said Micheal for the fifth time in two minutes. "I have a word to write down!"
>
> "How do you spell dinosaur?" asked Mark. "Oh, I know, say the word slower, dor... nos...xs...osr."
>
> "Mrs. Jenness, where can Mr. S fly," questioned Tim. "I know," he exclaimed as he looked at Angela's name card, "With Angels!"

The room atmosphere is electric. The children are busy interacting with one another, writing sentences and stories, or conferencing with the teacher. Some of the writers are reading their compositions to the aide. Certainly, this scene is typical of many classrooms where writing is a necessary component in the development of language literacy. However, these students are in kindergarten and most are Navajo.

Tara writes:

> Tes is a valentinem haos Tes is a vere nice Valentinem haos Sudbe is Kumeing to my haos the dod is fling. I Lik tat Prson tut-is Kming to my house tes poson i now tes poson i now tes poson tus gooing to my house har naem is rosie

Although this school houses a writing project, before last year, the kindergarten children attending Ganado Primary School

were not expected to be able to write freely and expressively. The students were expected to sound out and read some regularly phonetic words and copy sentences. However, they were not actually expected to write whole sentences and stories using their own spelling. To paraphrase Holbrook, 1981, it was quite possible that our teachers weren't so much not teaching writing, as they were simply overlooking the fact that some of the children already could.

This article is based upon observations within one kindergarten classroom located on the Navajo Reservation in the northeast corner of Arizona. The children within this public school classroom are a part of the school's 480 mostly Navajo, student population.

This kindergarten through third grade school, also houses the GLAD (Ganado Language Arts Development) Project, a school-wide writing and publishing project. Although the observations are limited to one classroom over a four-month period, the students' progress in that short time has the authors convinced that most kindergarten children are capable of real writing. Therefore young children should be allowed and expected to develop as writers even at the kindergarten level.

Getting Stated

With the assistance of one third grade class, we had the twenty-seven journals which we needed. It had been the third grader's class project to prepare the 30-page journals and although the kindergarten students didn't really know what to

make of the booklets on that first day, they were delighted with the presents.

During that first week of daily journal time, our purpose was to establish a low-risk classroom environment in which children could have numerous, successful experiences and thereby could view writing positively and purposefully. In beginning this process, we therefore asked the students what words they would like to write, we wrote the words on the blackboard, and the students copied them. When they had completed their entries, the students came up and read the journal entries to an adult. During this writing time, the students also had the option to copy any words from around the room or anyone else's words.

On the third day, Kathy asked, "Is it okay if I write my sisters' names?" We were prepared to write the names, and we asked which one she wanted written first. "That's okay," she answered. "I already know how to write their names."

Through a natural, meaningful interaction with her environment, this young girl had learned to spell the names of significant others. In addition, we found that she could already spell "dad," "mom," "I love you," and several other words and phrases for which she had little use thus far in school.

We began with the premise that kindergarten children could learn to write expressively if we would only provide the right environment. How could we blame Kathy for stealing our thunder. She had no way of knowing that kindergarten students were not supposed to know how to write words yet.

We were delighted to realize that other students also had untapped resources. Many of these young children could write the names of family members. In addition, we found that some could also write the names of colors, of fast food stores, of high frequency foods and beverages and even of some television characters. However, it seems tragic that many similiar children might never fully participate as these children were in their own education, that their hidden resources would remain untapped and that they would remain chained to learning the alphabet in the name of education.

It is no wonder that Holbrook, 1981, stated that many children enter school filled with poetic images and unique word useage, which they tend to lose once they have undergone "proper" language teaching. We found that many of our Navajo students entered school with the capacity to move directly into writing on a daily basis. In fact, many had already formed strong concepts about written language.

Most students knew that it carried meaning and that its form had certain properties. It is quite possible that many young authors had had years of home experiences at imitating writing, at scribbling and at inventing their own stories. Unfortunately, this rich enthusiasm and readiness for real writing is traditionally lost, not because we expect too much, rather, that in education we often settle for too little.

Writing and Inventive Spelling

Carol Chomsky, 1975, noted that although young children's

early writing efforts may not resemble adult writing and therefore sometimes passes un-noticed, preschoolers do have the ability to categorize sounds. She added that even prior to formal instruction, many children have learned to construct inventive spellings, and are very scientific as they hypothesize and revise rules. Further, McPherson, 1977, noted that all writing, no matter how incoherent or how incomplete it may seem, does represent an attempt at communication, an attempt that must be treated with respect.

Progressing into the second week of journals, some of the students began wanting to express phrases and simple sentences. Building on the special interest of those few, we introduced the concept of a sentence. For some students, this strange c[illegible]ot was explained in Navajo. While it is important to stress that not all students were ready to write sentences, some did excel.

Students grow from their successes and take greater risks and so do teachers. As a result of student progress, an inservice on inventive spelling and the reliance of the students on the teacher as a walking dictionary, the kindergarten writing program took a significant turn. The kindergarten students were now expected to experiment with their own inventive spelling. Given large sheets of "story paper," the students were asked to draw pictures and to write stories about them. If they came to a word they didn't know how to spell, they were encouraged to listen for the sounds in the word and write them down. Some could do this and others required extra help.

When they were finished, they would "read " the story to an adult within the classroom and the work would be posted. On

other occassions, the teacher would translate the child's writing into adult writing and display both. As a final class project, selected stories of each child were combined and published as a 74 page volume by the school's writing project.

In expecting that the students would accept responsibility for their spelling and writing, the children gained confidence in their own ability to express themselves. Children such as Kathy, who had already obtained a good phonetic background and was working ahead of the class, actually wrote full pages. When told that it was okay to write smaller, she wrote even more.

> The sun is siing in my Eyes it is verie nis i tic that it is verie verie Nis its his tining are all ovr the sun bekrusons it is nis i ming vere nis wyiy dot you dot tik that the sun is verie nis wel look at it and you wel see wel it tek that it is nis wel it is vere nis i do to we are fres naw naw you see haw i wele tik that it is veris nis wel me to we love ethuthr yes wi sol tik tut that it is nis the enD

The quality of these children's work varied because of several factors: language sophistication, ability to speak English, maturity, and knowledge of letter sounds. For instance, David who was developmentally about two years behind the rest of the class, was able to put "letters" in rows under his drawing and to tell what the "words" said.

''ob6v'oooo6De6oo6cluaornasnuE
(Pac Man)

Early Stages of Writing Growth

For young writers Dyson, 1981, felt the essential writing problem is not how to encode talk, but rather how to make meaningful graphics about which to talk. She added that children's early writing reflect the diversity of strategies in the early writing processes. These products suggest that early writing is only partly a paper-and-pencil activity and that talking strategies are also used to make meaning on paper. According to Dyson:

> Writing does not necessarily begin with the understanding of the alphabetic principle. Writing may begin with the selection of an idea, a thought, a thing to put in print- and the discovery of some strategy for making that thought visible. Conversely, writing may begin with the forming of print- and the search for some strategy to make the print meaningful.

Although the routes which young children take towards effective manipulation of the conventions of writing vary widely, many educators have observed that early writings demonstrate attempts to establish order. The following developmental sequence appears to be representative.

1. The child tries to develop a theory about written language as he mimics writing activities in his environment by making marks on paper, without the sensitivity that print carries meaning.
2. The child develops the concept that writing has shape, is linear, and is directional. Although the student marks his papers with a group of letters or scribbling and there is

evidence that marks move from left to right, there is no evidence that the student understands the relationship of the marks to language. Ferreiro, 1978, described the early hypotheses of Swiss children, from both literate and illerate families as: it has shape, shapes are separated, and shapes go in lines.

3. The child labels, that is, he attaches meaning to print. The print may be scribbling a single letter, or a combination of both but it is obvious that the child understands that words are built out of letters. The child may have trouble distinquishing between print and drawing.

4. The child develops inventories. Clay, 1975, has found that young students' early writing attempts often contain inventories, word or symbol lists. These inventories are words that are known to the child and relate to a particular topic, (eg. names of family members, color words, etc.).

5. The child expresses content in single words and phrases. The child may use one or more words to carry the meaning of a sentence or a story.

The Teacher's Role

Whether the student is a native English or Navajo speaker or a Kathy or a David, to promote language proficiency among kindergarten students, the teacher must first believe that the child is capable of developing language. Secondly, the teacher must believe in the power of the child and allow and expect his or her participation. Thirdly, the teacher must be prepared to

risk. Lastly, the teacher must constantly expose her students to print and must give them numerous opportunities to test their own theories about language. In addition, the students in this program participated in the following language activities:

1. The kindergarten students were read to regularly. We would discuss parts of the story, the characters, events and alternative outcomes. We read several books by one particular author and discussed the author's style of writing and the illustrations. For example, emphasizing Dr. Seuss, we discussed rhyming words and strange characters.

2. Children were encouraged to draw pictures, to paint, and to work with clay and we discussed the objects with the young artists. The object was to get the students to tell a short story. Mrs. Jenness and her aide would write down the stories and have the students copy the words. However; since some students were limited English speakers, some might only name objects of the pictures.

3. The students learned phoentic sounds through our reading readiness program, Alphatime by the Arista Corporation. Many of the children's stories were about the "Letter People."

4. Journals of the children's favorite words were kept by them. Each day there would be a new category of words that the children would suggest and copy.

5. A few basic sight words, such as names of colors, their own names and those of their classmates, and words to label things around the room were taught.

6. Students memorized short poems and nursery rhymes.

7. We developed language experience stories cooperatively. The children supplied the words and helped with the spelling as the teacher wrote them down.

Conclusion

Even Navajo children enter kindergarten that first day with the anticipation that they will learn to read and write. All have been exposed to or surrounded by the structure and function of language. Many have had years of play with pencil, pen or crayons and have formed strong theories about what language does and how it is formed. Most have also learned to spell words that carry significance in their life. The time has come to raise our expectations for all students and to let the sun shine in their eyes. In the immortal words of Kathy, " Why don't you think the sun is very nice? Well look at it and you will see."

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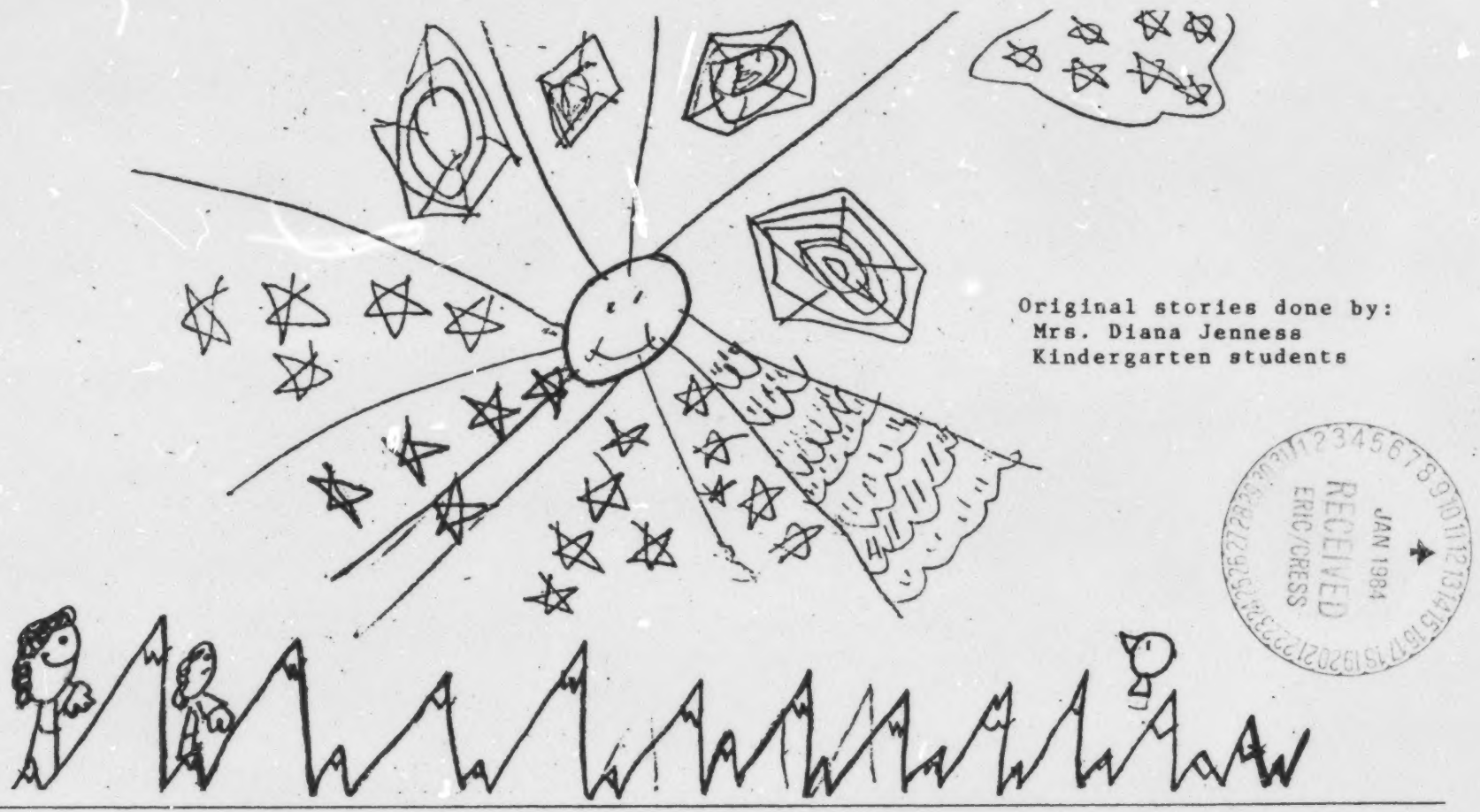
THE SUN IS SHINING IN MY EYES



Original stories done by:
Mrs. Diana Jenness
Kindergarten students

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District Nos. 19 & 20
GANADO, ARIZONA 86505

P R E F A C E

One of our goals in kindergarten is learning communication skills through speaking, writing, and reading readiness. Because the children are very interested in seeing their spoken words in print, they gain experience in dictating stories and labeling pictures. Expanding the use of dictation is the idea of invented spelling. The children make up their own spelling to tell about their pictures. Most of the children recognize the letters of the alphabet and can identify consistant consonant sounds. They are told to try to hear the beginning sound of the word and write it down. Then they are told to try to hear anymore sounds in the word. Studies of invented indicate that this gives children the chance to develop independence in expressing their own ideas.

This book is a collection of stories and pictures done by children in our class. Most of the spelling is their own. Others received help if were having problems. You will see the children's printing on the front of the page. On the bottom of the page is what the children read to me.

Our special thanks go to our Principal, Sigmund Boloz, for his encouragement and enthusiasm; to Lucinda Wauneka for doing all of the printing, assembling, and typing; and especially to the children for their wonderful stories and creative invented spelling.

Diana Jenness
Mrs. Diana Jenness
Kindergarten Teacher

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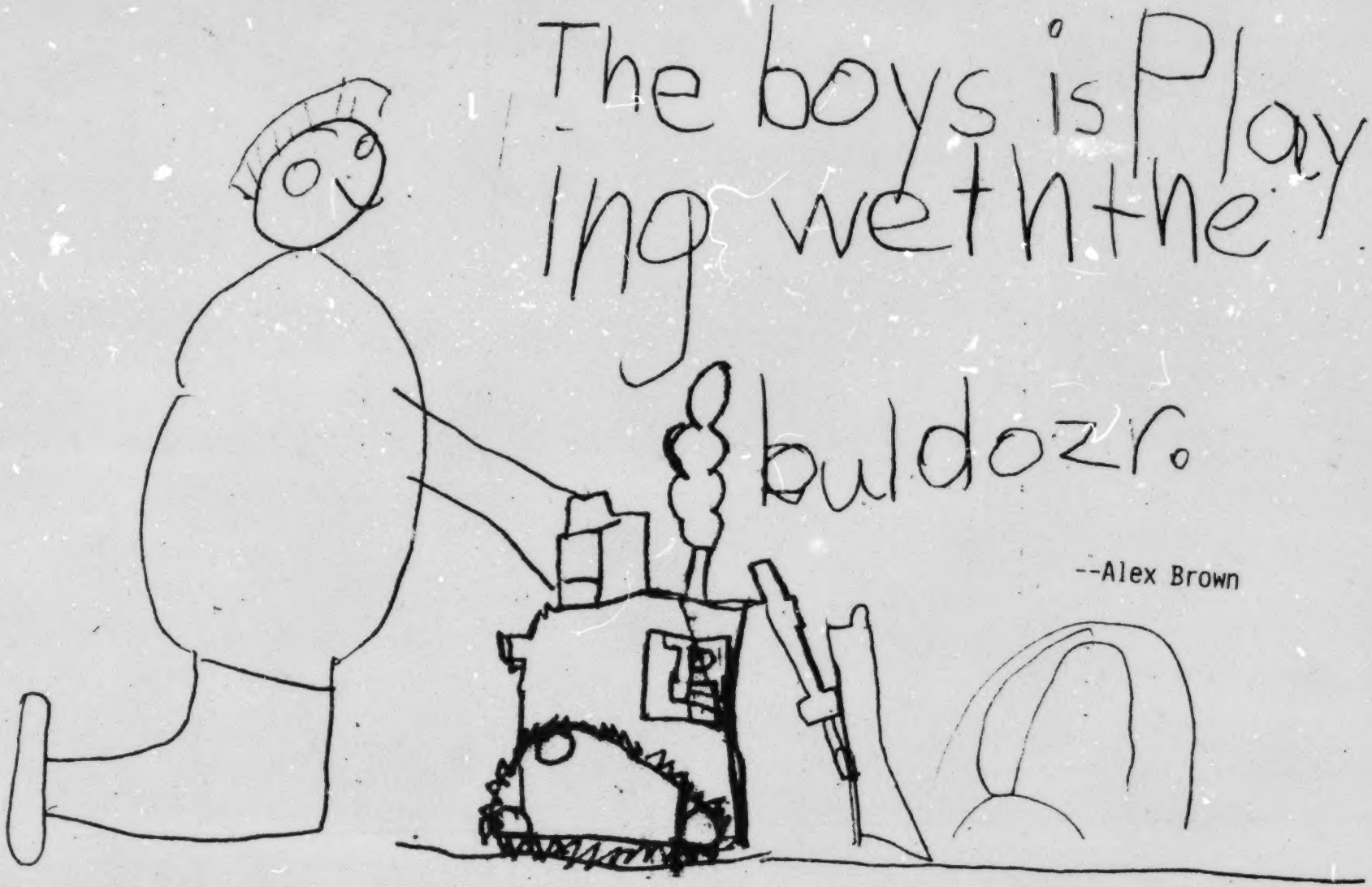
THERE IS A NEED FOR EACH CHILD TO BE HEARD

A CHILD WILL ONLY LEARN TO USE A LANGUAGE IF HE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO USE THAT LANGUAGE. A CHILD WILL LEARN TO READ A LANGUAGE IF HE FINDS MEANING IN THAT LANGUAGE. A CHILD WILL LEARN TO WRITE A LANGUAGE IF HE FINDS THAT OTHERS FIND MEANING IN HIS WORK.

--Sigmund A. Boloz



The boys is playing with the buildozer.

Mr S is in The sky and hesz fly ing with Angels.

--Alex Brown

Mr. S. is in the sky and he is flying with angels.

--Ronald David

My sister. She's trying to get the flower.

the Lade came home an no Bote Whos home an See didd not havee the Kees See Kod not gat in sind see if It's going too rann it is not going too rann Im Pe ha

--Valerie Jones

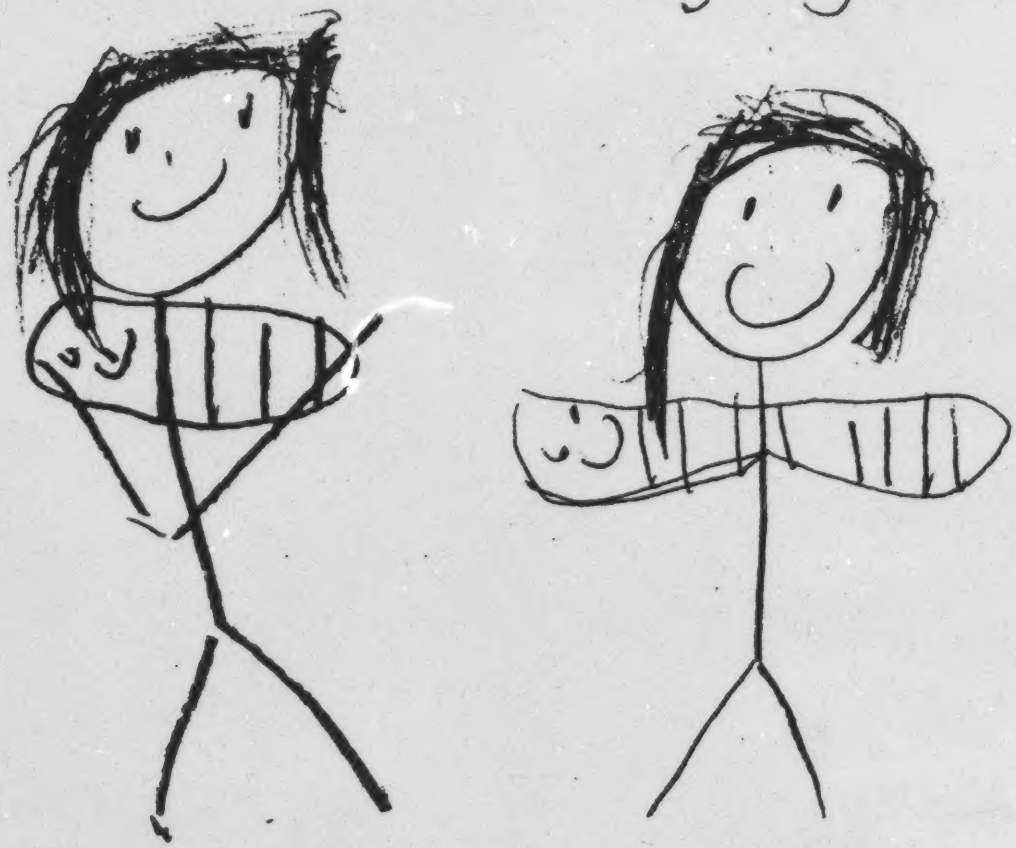
The lady came home and nobody was home and she did not have the keys. She could not get in. She is going to see if it is going to rain. It is not going to rain. I am happy.

--Stephanie

Tes is a valentinem haos tes is a vere nice valentinem haos Sudbe is kumeing to my haos the dod is fling I lik tat prson tut is Hming to my house tes poson I now tes, prson tus gooing to my house har naon is rose

This is a valentine house.
This is a very nice valentine house.
Somebody is coming to my house.
The bird is flying.
I like that person that is coming to my house. This person I know.
This person is going to my house.
Her name is Rosie.

The grils sharre wieh The DOLLers
an the grils are varre ree niss
the boys are Jsees geedee



--Valerie Jones

The girls share with the dollies. And the girls are very nice.
The boys are just greedy.

thbus girl is

--Daryl Stewart

The girls is getting on the bus.

The shark is getting the little boy.
The little boy is getting the
fish to eat it.

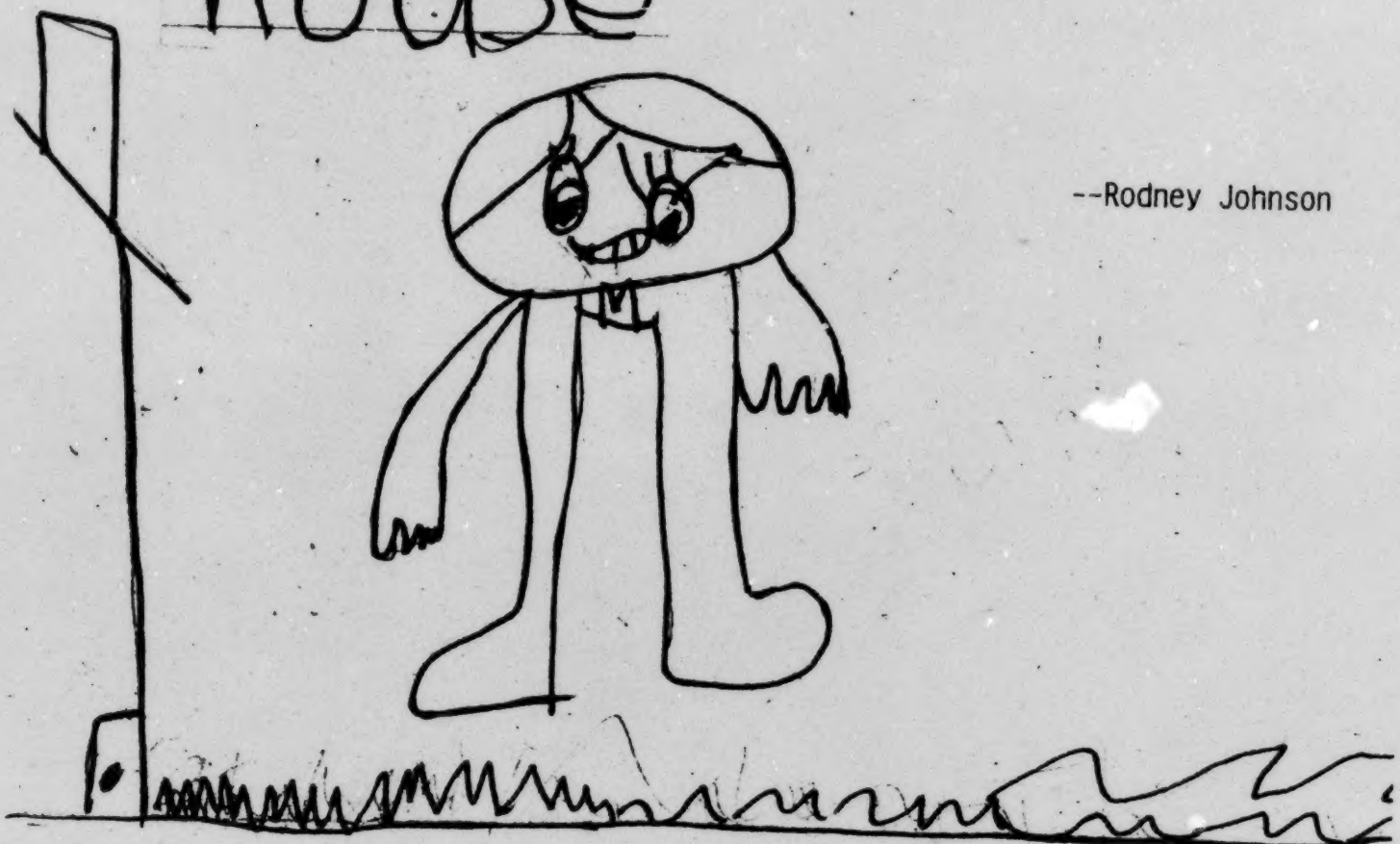
--Andy Dick

--Rodney

The house is on fire. It broke down and turned black.

--Milford Calamity

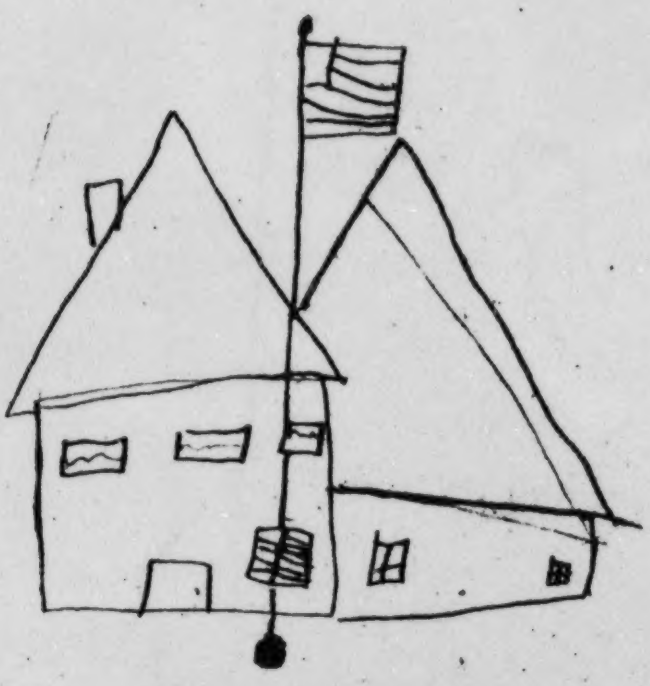
Mr M is GoN The house



--Rodney Johnson

Mr. M is going in the house.

--Maurice Gore



Ganado
Pms. Alex
Atmem
Valerie
Maurice

Ganado Primary School
A-Team Alex
Valerie
Maurice

the girl Brother Bak.
The is Cad Pkelyes

--Brandon James

The girl broke her back. The boy is sad because he can't walk.

mr l mrisho l he Thl
Brandon

--Brandon James

Mr. L is holding the tire.

The house has a fire. This is an apple tree.

--Alex Brown

Alex

The Dnorsrns is
mad at the tigr.
the tigr is mad.

The dinosaur is mad at the tiger. The tiger is mad.

--Brandon James

The TRHCER
ATOPS is THO
ROKCES

The triceratops is throwing rocks.

krsms is green.

egg fen.

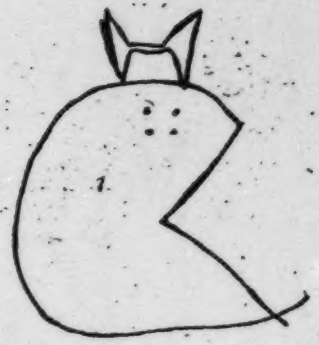
--Carmeta Mego

The Christmas tree is green. The egg is green.

--Jason Fader

Mr. L is made
Lollepopse.

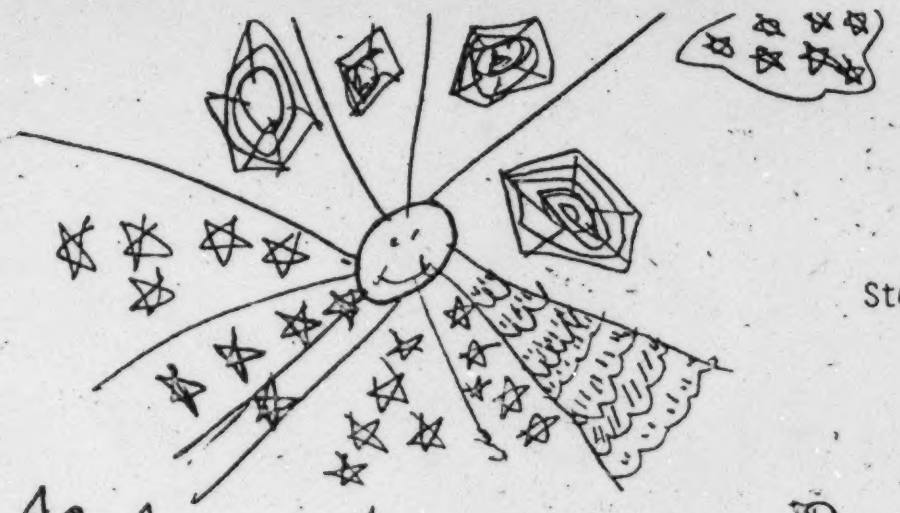
Mr. L is making lollipops.



The flags is
Good The
MousMous.
ThePacMan.
The catis sad.

--Wellementta Baker

The flag is good.
The house
The Pac-Man
The cat is sad.



Stephanie

The sun is siing in miy is Eyes it is verie nis i tic that it is verie verie nis its/hs tining are all ovr the sun bekrusons it is nis i'ming vare his Wyiy dot you dot tik that the sun is verie nis Wel look at it and you Wel see Wel it tek that it is his Wel it is verie nis i do to we are fres naw naw you see naw i Wele tik that it is veris nis Wel me to We love eetutr yes wi sd tik tut that it is nis the end

The sun is shining in my eyes. It is very nice. I think that it is very, very nice. It has things all over the sun because it is nice. It moving very nice, why don't you think that the sun is very nice? Well, look at it and you will see. Well, I think that it is nice. Well, it is very nice. I do too. We are friends now. Now you see how I will think that it is very nice. Well, me too. We love each other. Yes, I should think that it is nice.

The End

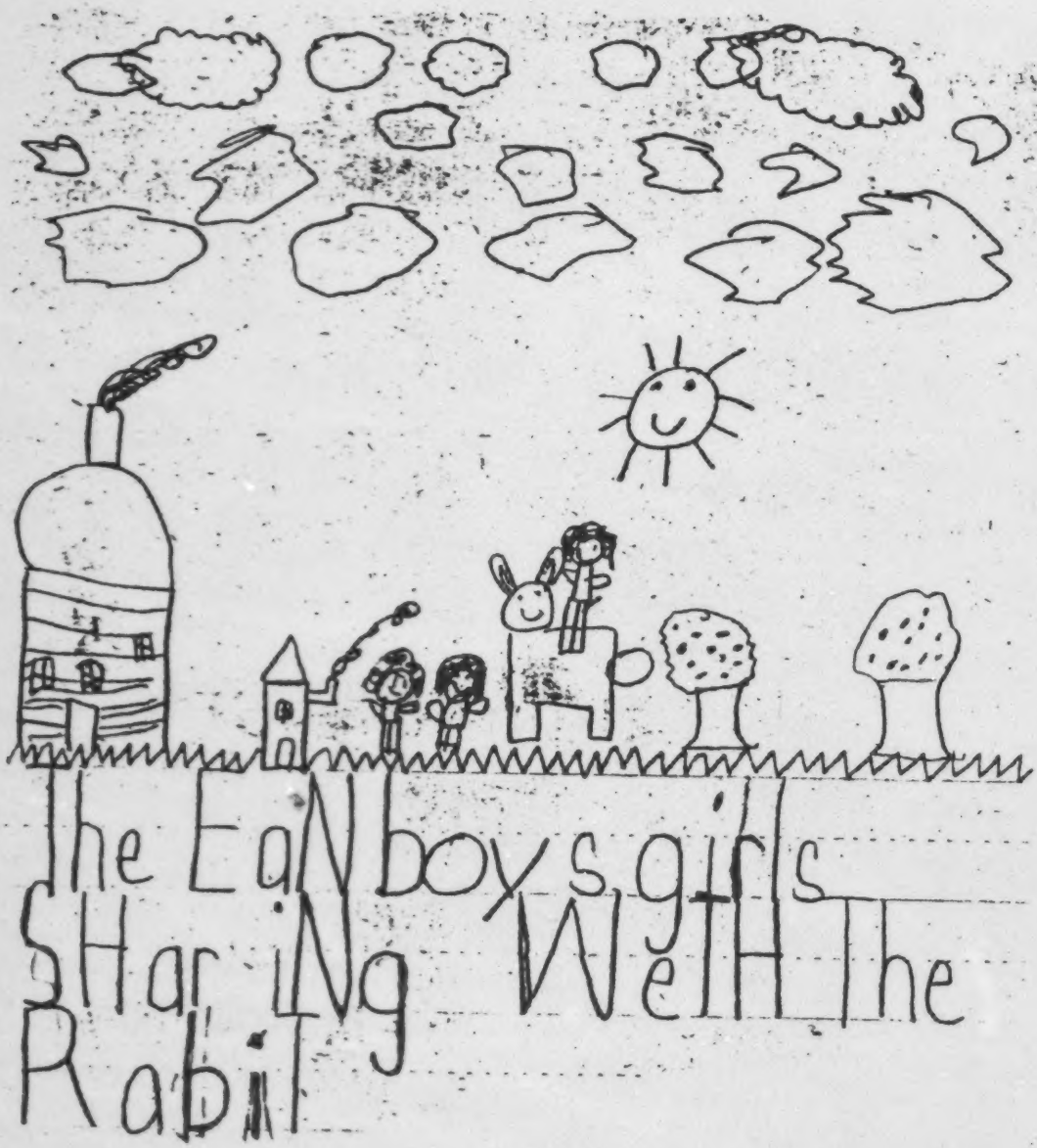
--Arlinda

he cake is red
he cams isgreen

The cake is red.
The candle is green.

--Rodney Johnson

He Man is fighting with skeletor.



--Marcie Evans

The boys and girls are sharing the rabbit.

This is me an I am

picking so'mee flors
an my hair is Brown
anmy eyes is Brown too

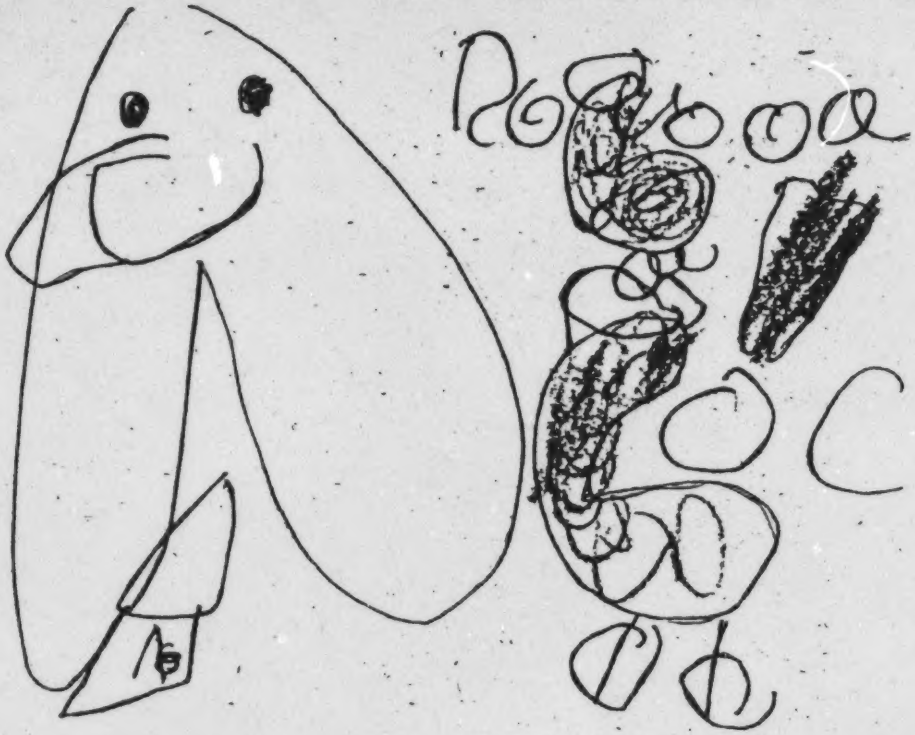
--Valerie Jones

This is me and I am picking some flowers and my hair is brown and my eyes is brown too.

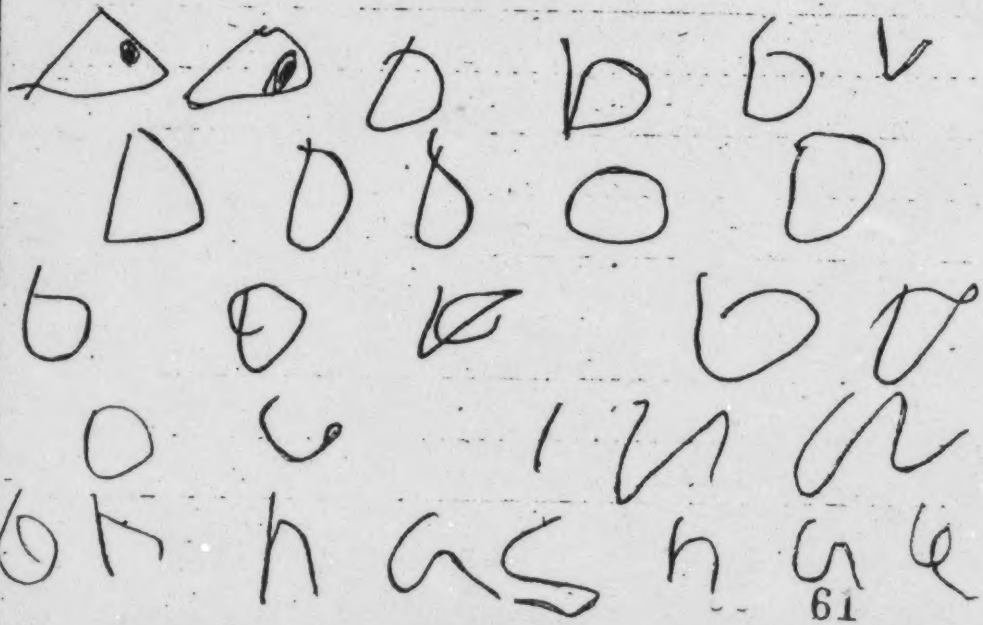
--Learoyd Begay

The Cat is on the tee

The cat is on the tree.



--Ronald David



--Vinson Shorty

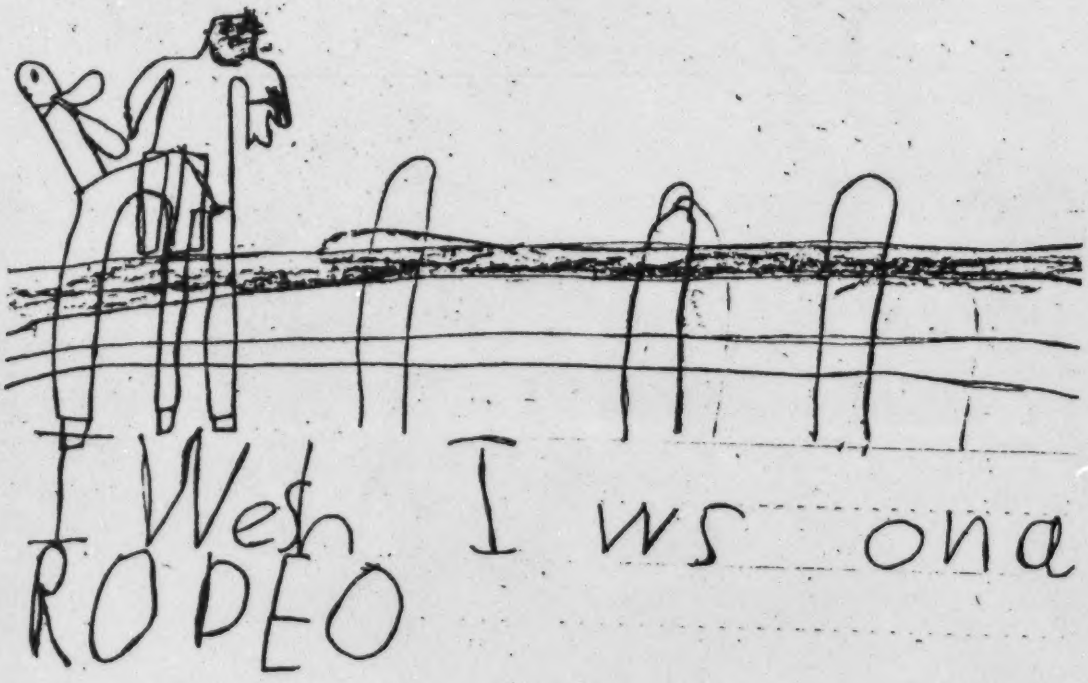
63 The house is little. The spider is on the tree.

Crsms is green
The Egg is yellow

--Arlinda John

The Christmas tree is green. The egg is yellow.

--Jason Fader



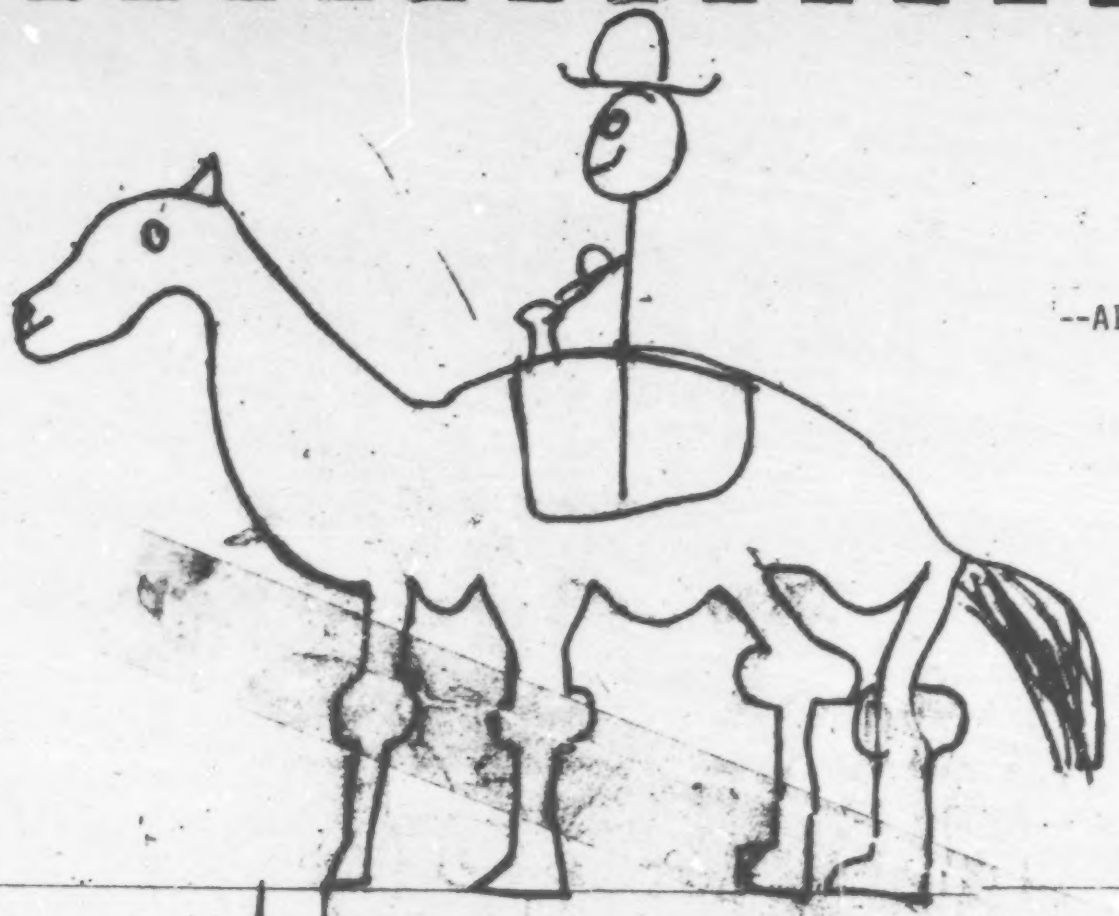
I wish I was on a rodeo.

--Tina Manning

Umbrella and flower.

--Brandon James

Mr. T shot the bad guys. He bust the window.



--Alex Brown

Thetrse
jompedonthe
man

The horse jumped on the man.

--Jason Fader

I wish I was a bug.

I Wish I wus a Bug.

--Marcie Evans

The boys AD girls
RwtDH

The boys and girls are riding the horse.

--Carmeta Mego

Ran The is Red
blue. purple
black yellow green

Rainbow
The rainbow is red, blue, purple, black, yellow, green.

--Jerome Yazzie

Sr Broosh P Aksad

Shirt Boots Spurs

Saddle Blankets

--Jason Fader

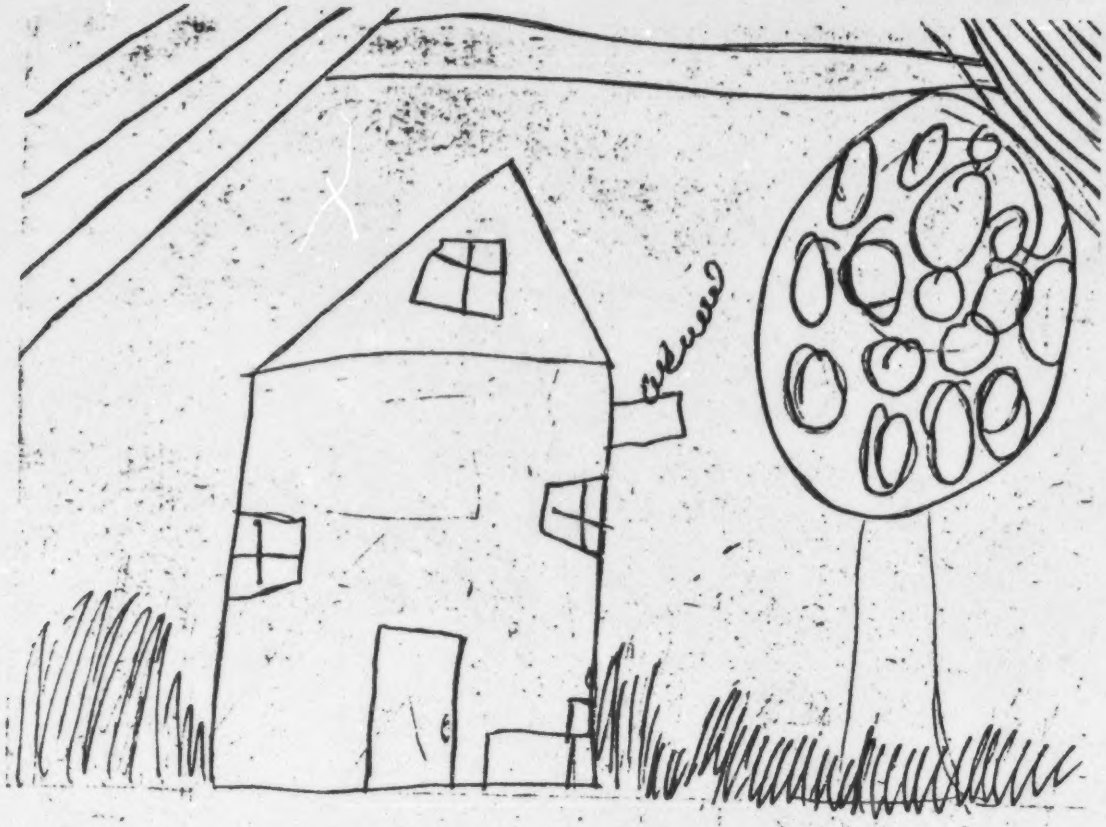
I am on The Rodo
I am goingto takoof

I am on the rodeo. I am going to take off.

The boys hs green grass
They play in The
grass

--Wellementta Baker

The boys have green grass. They play in the grass.



Has And

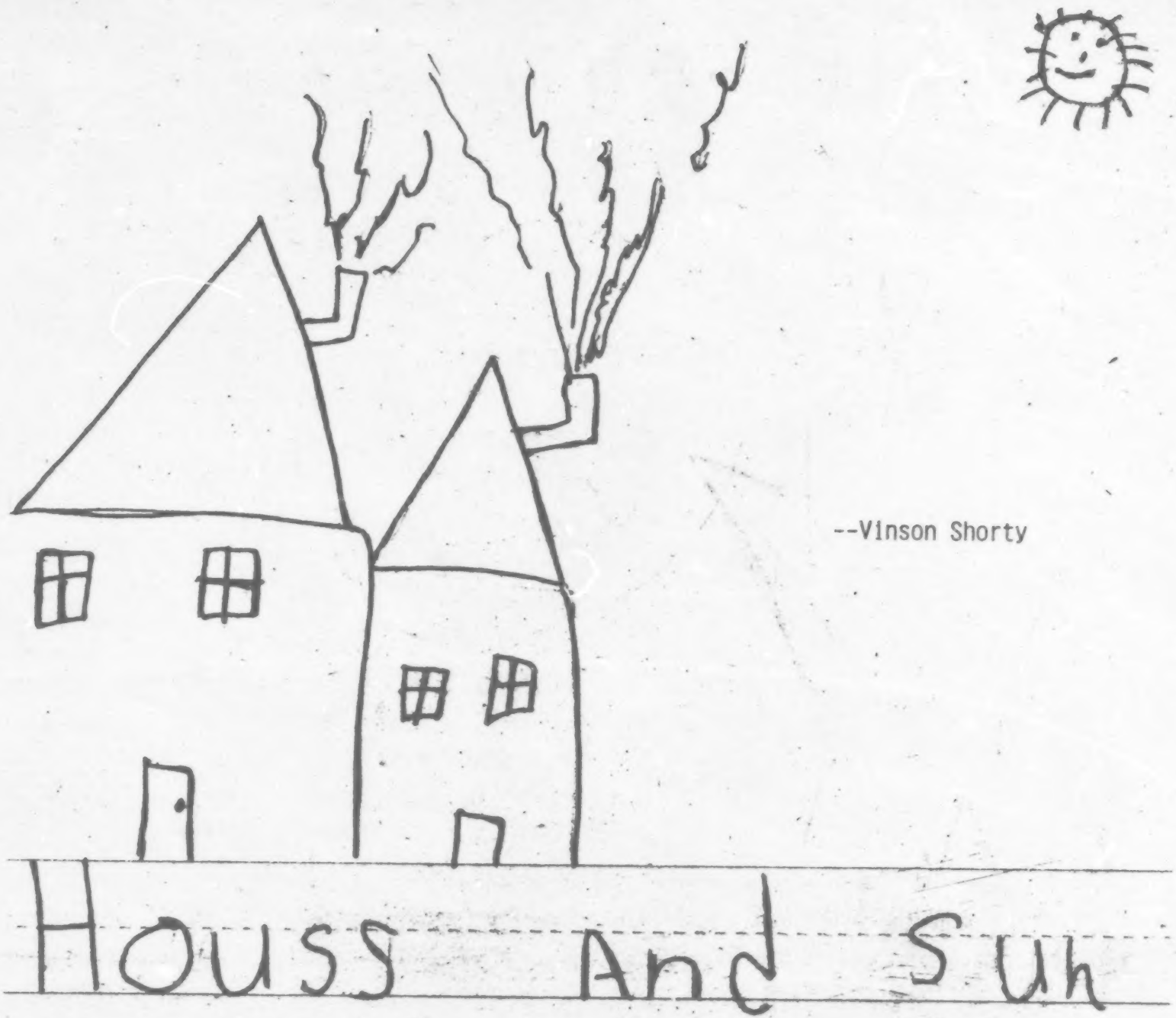
Thee

80

--Tara Smith

House and tree.

81



--Vinson Shorty

House and sun.

--Tina Manning

House and Tpee
boys And girl

House and teepees.
Boys and girls.

Mr C is wak ing

--Learoyd Begay

Mr. C is walking

--Jeriad McCabe

Jeriad belleri

This Indian shoots the other Indian.

I ym winn we orr then a was

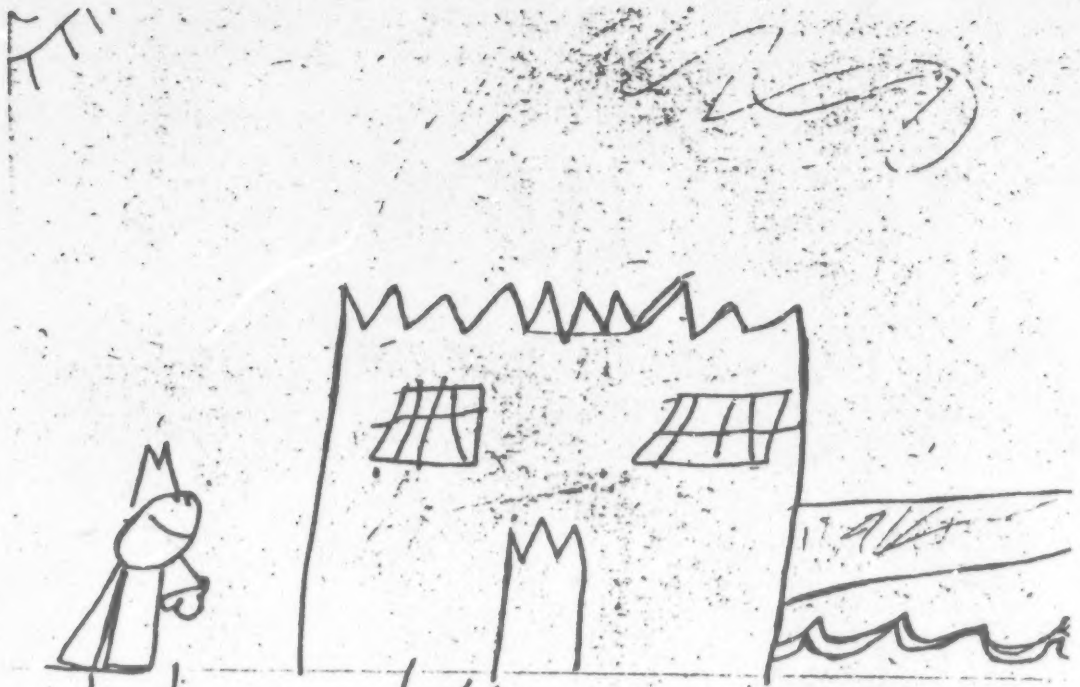
--Jason Fader

I am winning. We are having a race.

Sbbrawberr is red
The Sbtrawberr
is Goot

--Arlinda John

The strawberry is red. The strawberry is good.



The Kin is going
To the Kasol it
is kob aot s,b
it is snu ad sib
i em in sib uV thE
Kin Kasol

--Stephanie Peterson

The king is going to the castle. It is cold outside. It is sunny outside. I am inside of the king's castle.

--Marice Evans

The GHC I L O
CbC DCIEITTADCACOb
HHHOCCOBCIC
CANSBCCRS

Miss A's birthday. She is happy.

--Michelle Poola

The house is doing something.

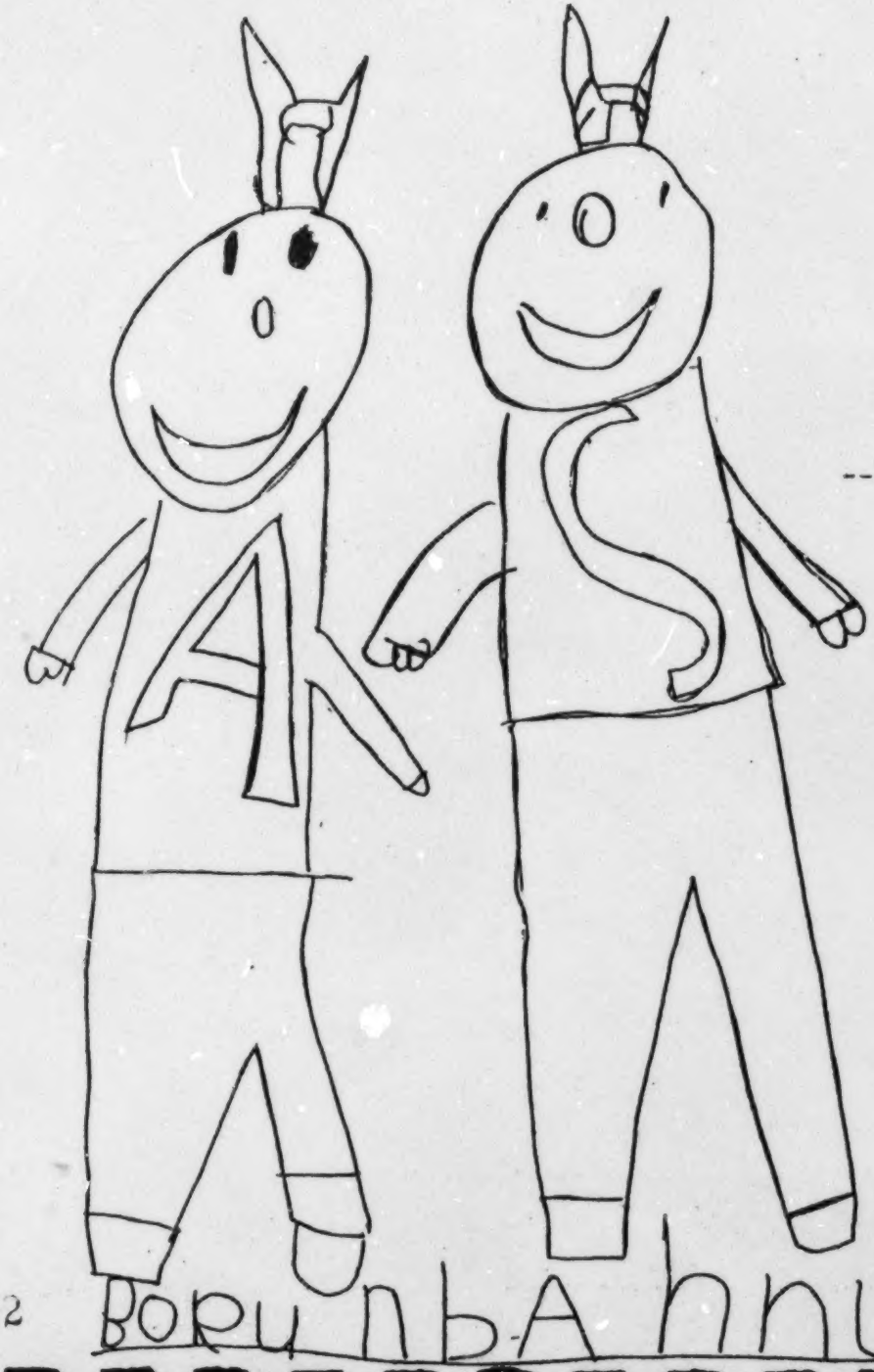
--JR Shondee

A baseball game.

The Grils is sing

--Learoyd Begay

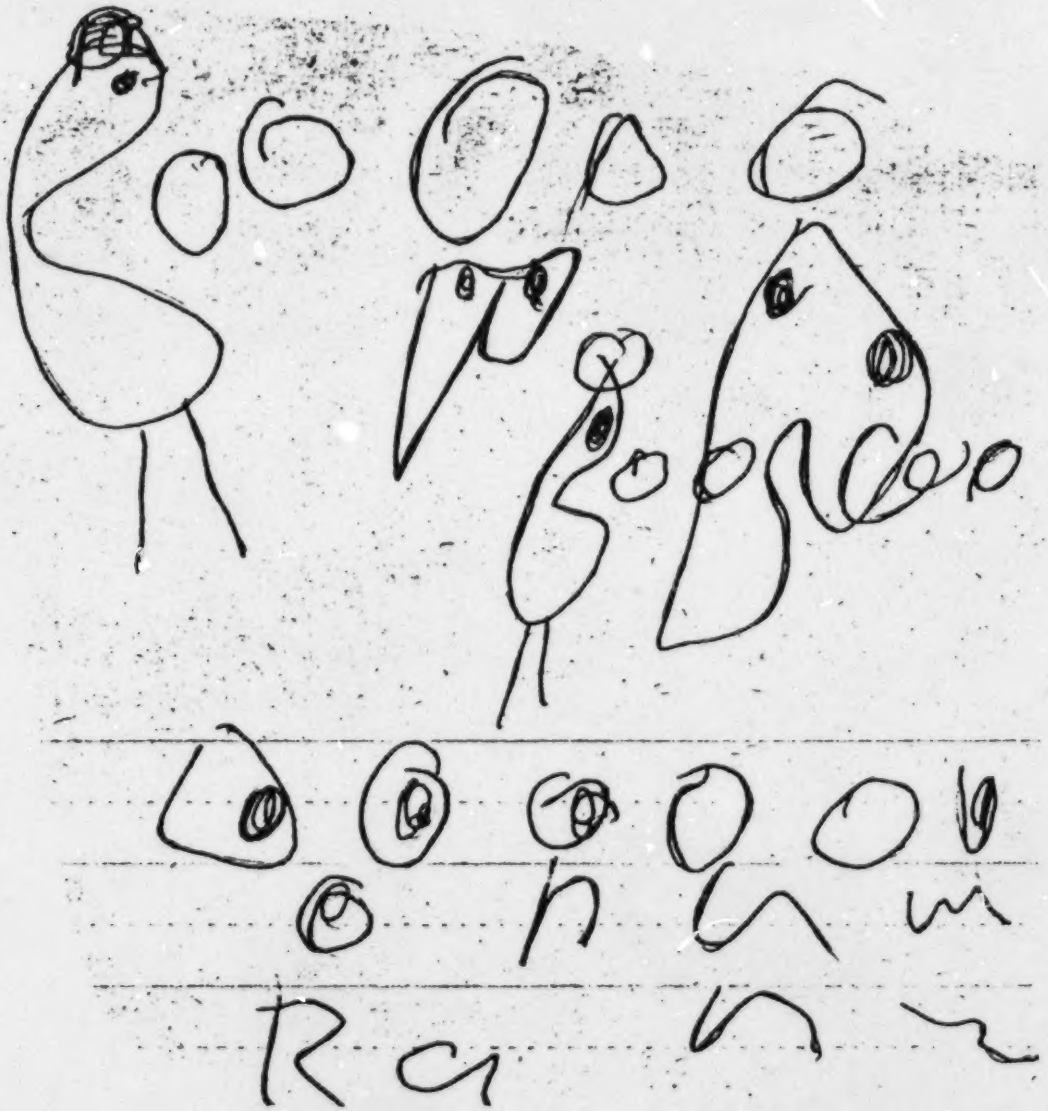
The girls are swinging.



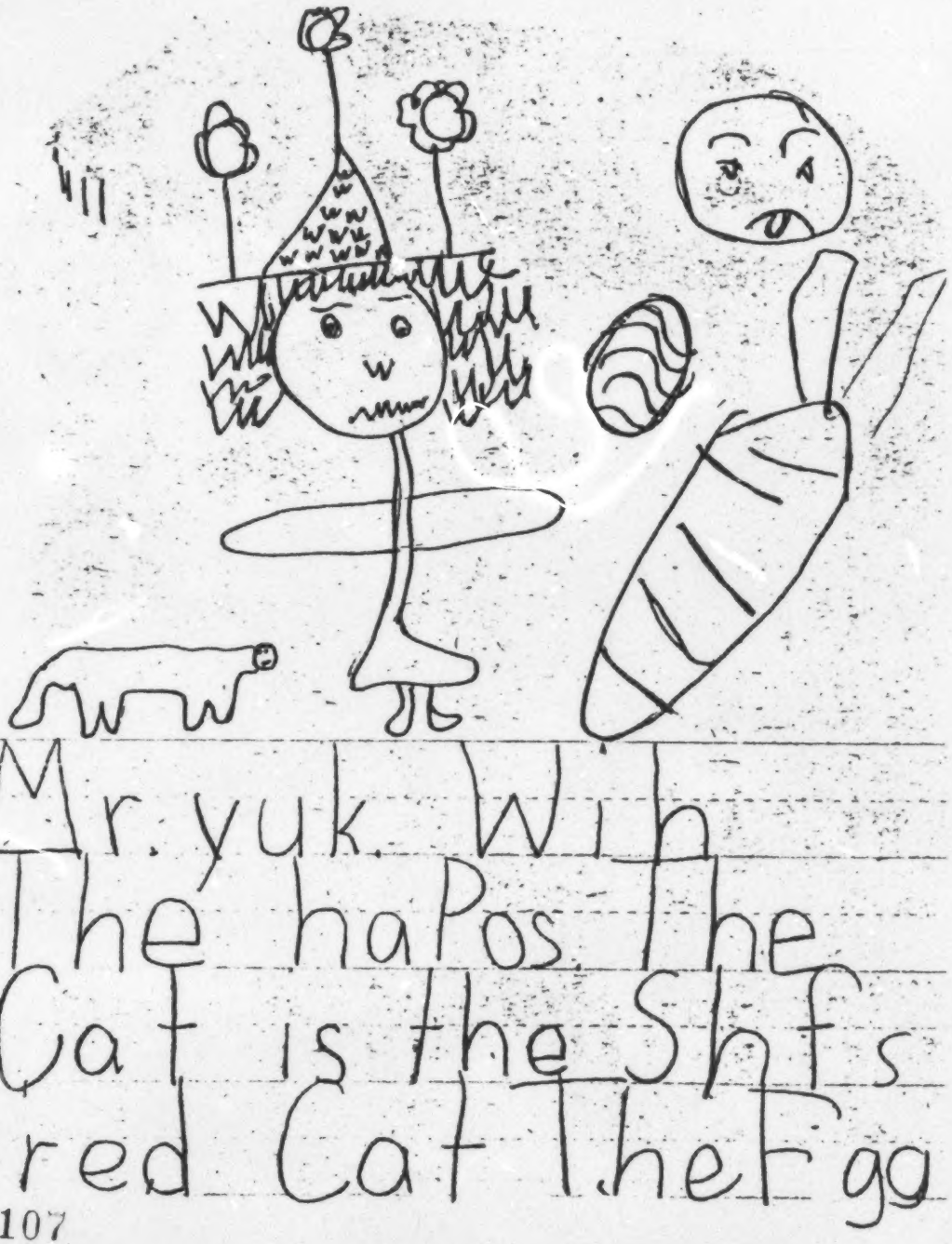
--Tara Smith

Boys and girls at school.

The boys are playing outside. It is warm outside. I am sad because the boys are not playing with me.



--Ronald David



--Wellementta Baker

Mr. Yuk Witch
The (?) The cat is the (?)
Red Cat The Egg

--Ronald David

Mama and Dad
They are happy.

Clymcron.
has won.

--Maurice Gore

Lone Wolf McCoy has won.

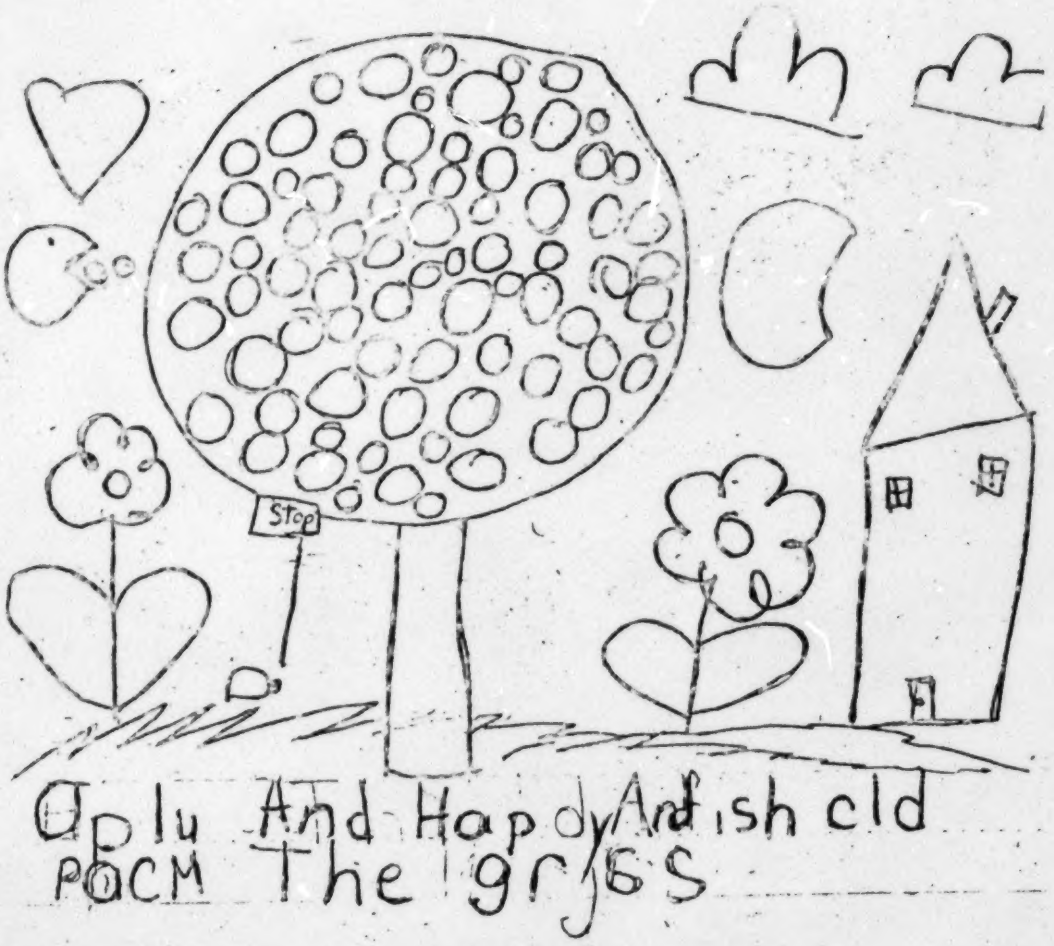
--Alex Brown

the-Dnos-aur-isseD
enjoy fyr and
HE Put fyron
the tre

The dinosaur is spitting out fire and he put fire on the tree.

--Marcie Evans

The fish is mad and somebody is riding on the top of the bridge.



--Wellementta Baker

Apple and house and cloud
Pac-Man. The grass.

--J.R. Shondee

DMQL HRXYZEG
CSBITNEKFLUV

The dinosaur is trying to catch the bird.

--Rodney Johnson

ThE DorNos Xs Os
is FiTE Eand
Themen Wtto kL
TheDorNos Ys Os
hEh WT

The dinosaur is fighting and the man went to kill the dinosaur.
He already got killed.

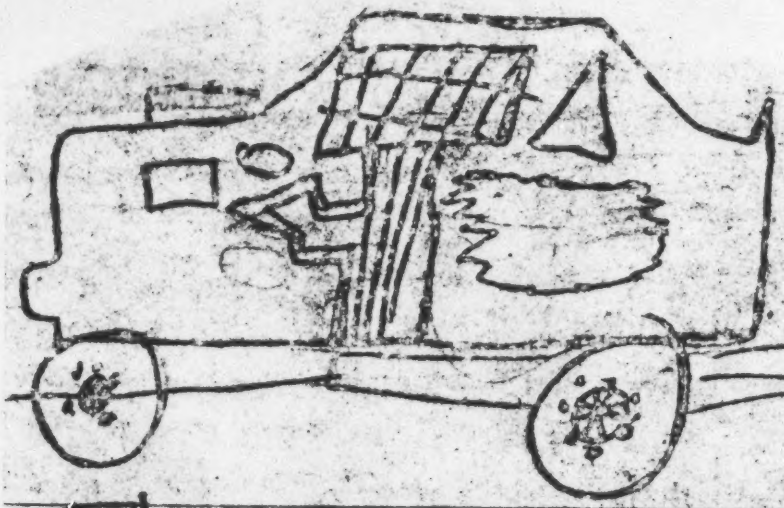
Ganado Primary School
The boy is playing remote control.

--Carmeta Mego

VLtm

Aro

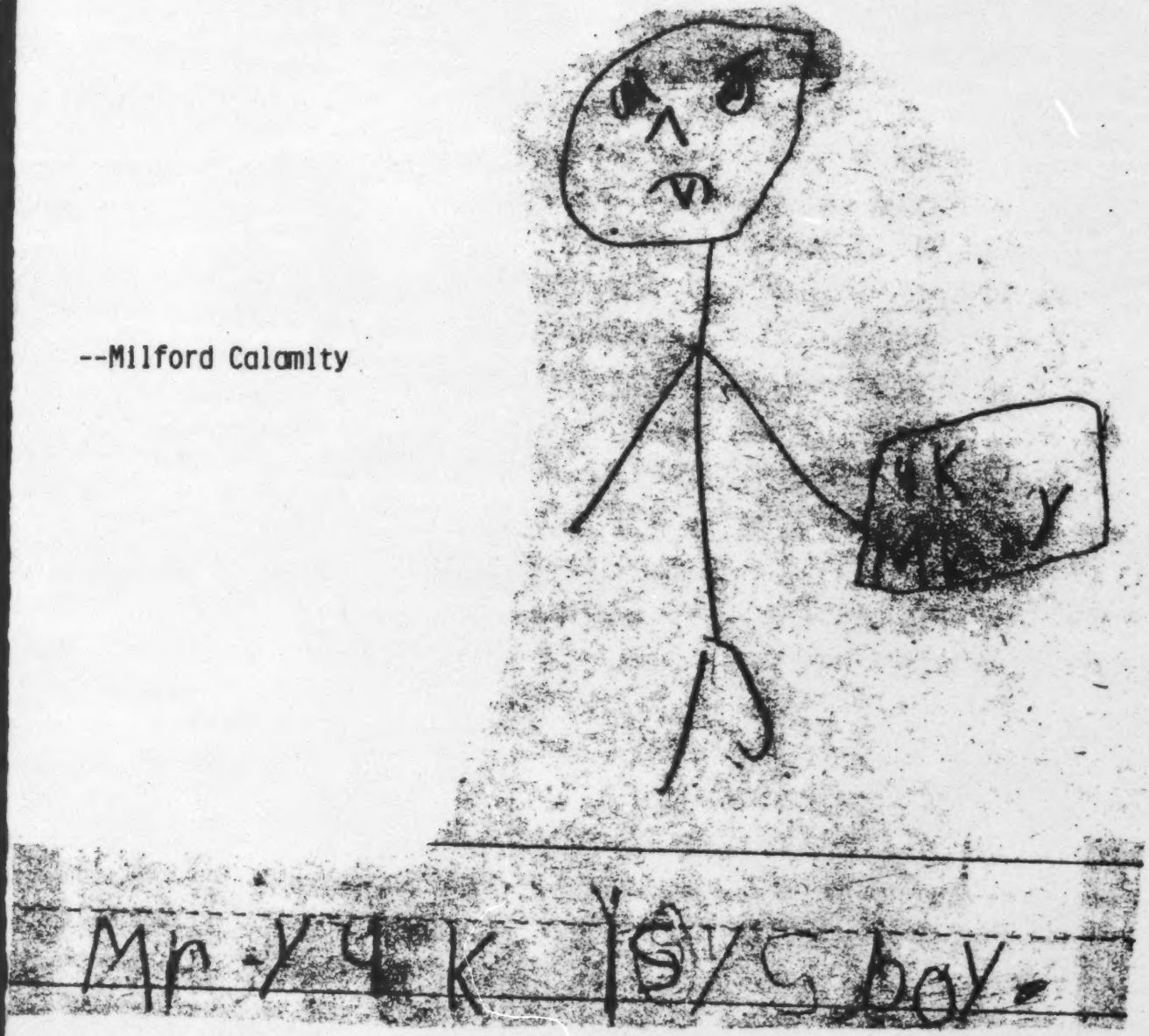
Valentine
Arrow



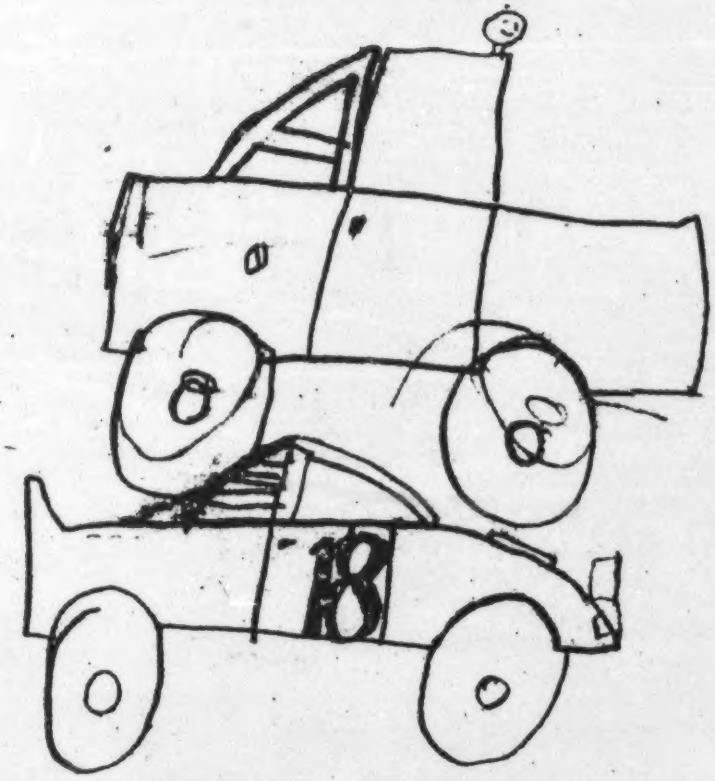
--Valerie Jones

This car is The
fasDis in The
houL WiP WrLD
an it is a Hot
WHeeL.

This car is the fastest in the whole wide world and it is a Hot Wheel.



--Milford Calamity



--Maurice Gore

The Rscr.
Pekuhp

The rescue pick-up.

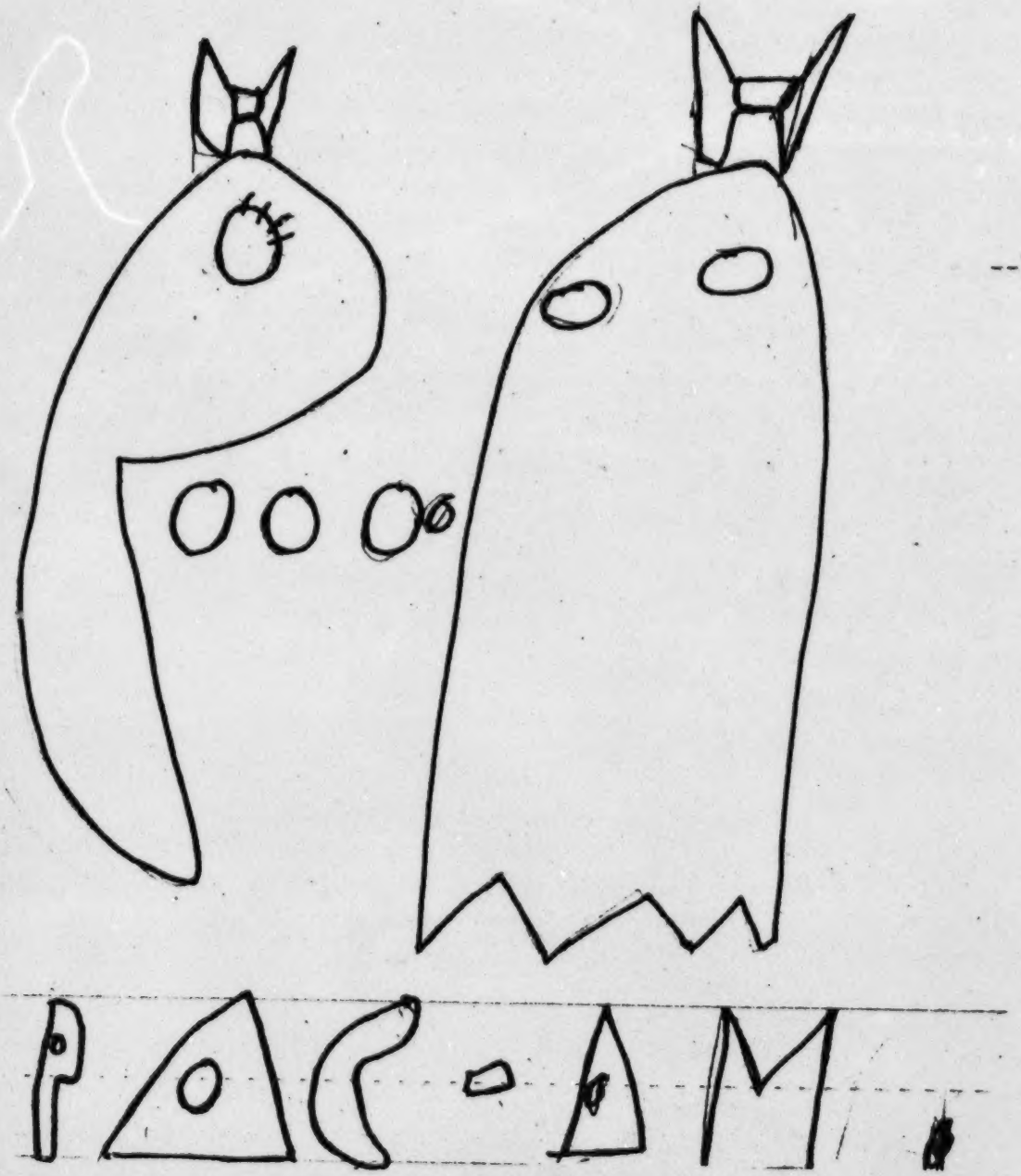
--Jerlad McCabe

The apples are falling down.

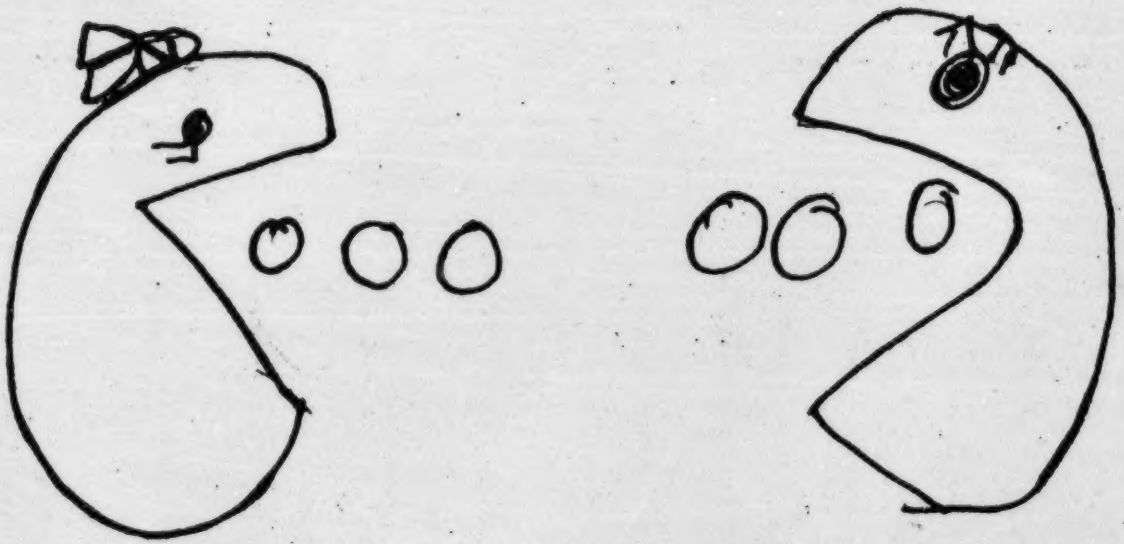
Thedinocr
NThekV

--Leoroyd Begoy

The dinosaur is in the cave.



--Tara Smith



Pac-Man re tpLkin

--Vinson Shorty

Pac-Man are talking

--Brandon James

The man is div
ing The oThway

The man is driving the other way.

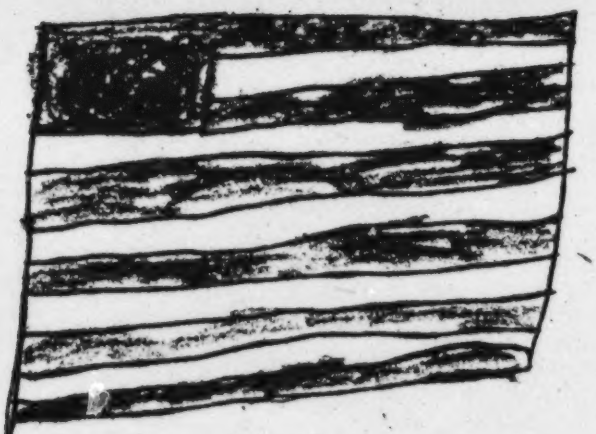
--Learoyd Begay

the Brd fly.

The birds fly.

--Carmeta Mego

House have window.



--Arlinda John

The flags is red wt blue

The flags is red, white, blue.